Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Radio Service
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Wednesday, July 21, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "EASIER IRONING." Information from the Office of Experiment Stations, United States Department of Agriculture.

--oOo--

If someone should run an *unpopularity* contest for household jobs, a good many housekeepers I know would vote for ironing, especially if they voted in summer. The irony of ironing is, if you will forgive a pun -- the *trouble* is that summer weather makes ironing most unpleasant just when it is heaviest. You know how clothes pile up and up on the ironing board whenever the temperature goes up and up.

Well, here's good news for the home ironer. At long last the scientists are coming to the rescue of that wearisome weekly event -- ironing day. At several State experiment stations in recent years home economists have included ironing in studies they were making of home laundry problems. And then, only this past spring, two engineers at the Virginia State experiment stations -- P. B. Potter and Frances Bass -- reported on their investigation of the selection and use of the electric iron. They studied ironing for best results as well as for saving time, effort, and electricity. They tried out different makes of irons and different fabrics. And they learned a good deal about the right dampness of clothes for ironing and the right temperatures of the iron. I can't hope to tell you today *all* of their findings. But I do want to let you in on some of the facts about dampness and temperature which may make your summer ironing job easier.

Every housewife knows from experience that the dampness of clothes makes a great difference in how fast and how well they iron. Back in 1931 Miss Roberts at the Washington State experiment Station reported that "good results in ironing depend on the moisture-content of clothes." But she added -- sorrowfully I'm sure -- that "no scientific test for correct moisture has been found so the housewife can only learn by experience how much water to use in sprinkling and how long to leave the garment rolled."

Happily, the Virginia workers did not leave it at that. They set out to find just how damp fabrics should be to iron well and easily and quickly.

First, they went to different homes and tested clothes sprinkled for ironing. And they found that the usual hand-sprinkling method gives what they call "very irregular results." In fact, they found that the moisture-content of these different hand-sprinkled clothes varied from 19 to 90 percent. Obviously some of these would be too dry to iron well; others would be so wet they would take a good deal of time and effort to iron dry. What the Virginia scientists wanted to find out was the best or, as they called it, the "*optimum* moisture-content" for ironing. For their tests they chose 3 materials that seemed typical of materials in clothes ironed in most homes. These were linen crash toweling, Indian Head cotton muslin, and rayon dress goods.

They tried dampening these fabrics by sprinkling and also by dipping and hanging them to dry. They found that sprinkling with a fine spray gives more even results than shaking water on by hand, but that the dipping-and-hanging method proved to give the most even dampness. You may be interested to know that in using this method they found that rayon dried to its "ironing point" most quickly, cotton next, and linen last. The Virginia scientists say that each material has a characteristic "feel" when it contains the right moisture for ironing. Cotton has distinct wrinkles when held firmly in the hand; rayon feels "just damp" and cold; linen feels wetter. Apparently, it pays to feel clothes before you start ironing.

Another way to test for the right dampness they found was to try the iron on the fabric. How easily the iron goes over the material and the looks of the material after pressing both show whether it is too wet or too dry. At the right point for ironing the iron moves easily across the surface leaving a smooth dry path; it will completely dry the material and remove all wrinkles with 1 or 2 ironing strokes.

You'll be interested in what the tests with the different fabrics showed.

Cotton needs less moisture than linen to iron well. Rayons vary. Some require as little moisture as cotton and others as much as linen.

Both linen and cotton can be dampened successfully for ironing by sprinkling but cotton needs even and thorough dampening to prevent "dry wrinkles" and linen must lie in a tight container long enough to distribute the moisture evenly. With rayon, sprinkling is not satisfactory because it leaves water-spots. Rayon, which had been sprinkled and left in an air-tight container 24 hours, was fairly evenly damp, but after ironing it still showed the original water spots. As for the temperature of the iron, rayon required a low temperature for good results -- that is, an iron heated to from 275 degrees Fahrenheit to 325 degrees. Cotton required a medium temperature -- that is, from 325 to 375 degrees -- and linen took the most heat -- a high temperature from 375 to 425. That is, linen needs a hundred degrees more heat than rayon.

The Virginia study also showed that the right dampness and the right heat are not the only requirements for a good ironing job. The iron itself has much to do with it. And the experimenters report that a good iron is a necessity; that cheap, bargain-type irons seldom do satisfactory work. I wish I had time to tell you all they learned about irons. I'll have to save that news for another day.

Briefly, the chief features listed by the Virginia workers for a good electric iron are: thermostatic control; 1000-watts heating capacity; and light-weight, because light-weight irons are less tiring to work with yet satisfactory for home ironing where heavy pressure is not necessary. Other desirable features reported for an electric iron are: a permanently attached cord; a moulded rubber handle; a tip-up safety rest; a thermostat dial marked with the names of the materials and an "off" position.

# # # # #